

18 March 1975

Perspectives for Intelligence: 1975 - 2000

1. Over the next twenty-five years, the distribution of power and the pattern of relationships among the nations of the world is unlikely, in gross terms, to change significantly. US and Soviet strategic military capabilities will remain in balance and continue to overshadow the military capabilities of any other nation or combination of nations. US relations with Western Europe and Soviet relations with Eastern Europe will be subjected to continuing tensions and adjustments. And relations between the two blocs will become more deeply interwoven and complex, economically and culturally. But in a strategic sense the two blocs will remain internally cohesive, identifiably separate, and in confrontation.
2. China's nuclear weapons capability will increase substantially during this time frame, as will its industrial base. It will aspire to super-power status but will continue to lag well behind the US and USSR. As a dynamic society undergoing rapid change, China's initiatives on the international scene are likely to be less predictable than those of maturer societies. As it matures and gains confidence from its increasing strength, however, China may well tend to play a less strident and disruptive role than in the past.

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3. Major changes are likely to occur in the relative power and influence of a number of secondary powers. Iran, Brazil, and Nigeria are strong candidates to play more forceful roles, both regionally and internationally. Traditional animosities, as between Greeks and Turks, Indians and Pakistanis, and Arabs and Israelis will persist. And new bilateral confrontations will develop. From all these factors, regional, so-called small, wars are likely to persist and perhaps increase in frequency. Nationalistic considerations will be the primary cause of most of these confrontations; ideology will play a minor role.

4. Instability in the relationships among the smaller powers is unlikely, however, to upset the basic equilibrium of the great powers. The latter will continue to try to exploit regional confrontations in their own national interests. But the risk of small wars escalating into big, nuclear, wars will weigh heavily on the major powers and will be likely to continue to induce discretion on their part. The art of preventing small wars from developing into big wars will, thus, be further developed and refined. The process is likely to be melded into the continuing efforts of the super-powers to agree to the limitation and perhaps even the eventual reduction of armaments.

5. As with political developments, world economic developments over the coming quarter century will be characterized by relative stability among the highly industrialized nations, extraordinary growth in a number of secondary powers, and continued acute poverty and stagnation in most of the Latin American, African, and South Asian nations. International arrangements for the more orderly exchange of capital, raw materials, goods, and services will proliferate and deepen and result in a more complex and shock-resistant interdependence among the world's major trading nations. Serious imbalances and tensions will from time to time strain the international economic fabric, as they have during the past two years. But it is unlikely that anything so traumatic to the world's economic equilibrium as the current energy crisis will soon recur. Assuming a gradual and orderly recovery from this crisis in the next few years, the outlook over the longer term is for the rapid development of a variety of energy sources. Whether with respect to energy, food or raw materials generally, the major industrial powers are likely to devote considerably more effort than in the past to long-term planning and the search for alternative means to meet their essential needs, in order to avoid disruption of the economic process.

6. The foregoing relatively sanguine view of the future is clouded by several major uncertainties. The most serious of these is the playing out of the nuclear proliferation issue. 25X6A

India has exploded a nuclear device, and Pakistan, Iran, South Africa, Argentina, Taiwan,

are either known to be developing a nuclear weapons capability or to have the means to engage in such a program. These and many other nations could, by the year 2000, have nuclear weapons.

7. A straight-line projection of this proliferation trend, however, seems unlikely. While there appears to be little prospect that the five permanent members of the Security Council would ever agree to a total ban on nuclear weapons, it seems equally unlikely that they, together with a substantial number of other nations both great and small which have voluntarily foresworn the nuclear option or which are too poor to acquire one, would allow themselves to be put in the position of vulnerability to nuclear blackmail from a variety of secondary powers. It would seem logical, therefore, that the trend towards proliferation will be accompanied by at least an equally powerful trend to stamp it out. If, in fact, a number of secondary nations acquire nuclear weapons before an international

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ban is agreed to, or in defiance of such a ban, resolution of the problem will be more traumatic and involve high risks to international equilibrium. It will probably involve unilateral action by one or more of the major nuclear powers to eliminate nuclear capabilities of secondary powers. The likelihood of such extreme sanctions would increase if one of these secondary nations employed, or even seriously threatened to employ, a nuclear weapon.

8. Another major uncertainty, alluded to earlier, is the role to be played by China as its power increases. There will undoubtedly continue to be periods of extreme tension between China and the USSR, and miscalculation by the leaders of either nation could conceivably lead to nuclear war between them. Given the presumed effects of a nuclear exchange on both countries, this would appear an unlikely possibility unless the government of either were in a condition of extreme instability and demoralization.

9. China will also push hard to eliminate the Taiwan issue. But in pursuing this aim it will not seriously risk destroying its "understanding" with the US so long as it feels it needs such an understanding to counterbalance Soviet pressure. As its power and nuclear capability increase, however, it may become progressively less interested in the American connection.

10. In other international areas, China will encourage the evolution of benign governments on its periphery and ideologically combat the Soviet influence world-wide. It will probably continue to be too preoccupied and engrossed by problems of internal development, however, to project its power aggressively into foreign areas.

11. The possibility of a rapprochement between China and the Soviet Union is obviously of special concern to the US and cannot be discounted. Even if it were to occur, however, it is difficult to conceive of it as a strong and permanent phenomenon. The conflict of cultures and interests of the two nations appears so deep that only a major external threat, common to the both, could presumably override their mutual antagonisms.

12. A further major threat to great power equilibrium in future years is the possibility of technological breakthroughs, primarily in two areas. One is the development by any nation of a significantly improved weapons system, either offensive or defensive. The other is the development by either the USSR or China (or the US) of techniques to deny to the others the "national means of verification" of their weapons inventories. The latter would be particularly critical as it would greatly increase the risk of miscalculation in relations between the super-powers.

13. Technological breakthroughs, phenomena which futurists refer to as "disconnects," are essentially unpredictable. Other examples of "disconnects" are irrational acts by key world leaders and sudden major shifts in a nation's policies as a result of coups or the assassination of key leaders.

14. A final major threat to great power equilibrium in future years will be the possibility of the inadvertent escalation of minor confrontations through a miscalculation of motives, intentions, and capabilities. As noted above, the fear of escalation will inhibit adventurous efforts by the major powers to exploit secondary confrontations. But the latter are likely to increase in frequency, and the machinery developed by the major powers to control their escalation is far from foolproof.

15. The foregoing summary projection of world developments over the coming quarter century suggests some important changes in emphasis for intelligence. The nuclear proliferation issue is likely to increase in priority throughout the period--unless, of course, it is eliminated. China, also, will almost certainly absorb a progressively greater share of the community's total effort. The USSR, small wars, and crisis situations among secondary powers will probably retain roughly the same priorities they now enjoy.

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And economics will probably revert in a few years' time to the position it held before the energy crisis. And, finally, it is to be hoped that the intelligence community will develop a higher sensitivity to the possibility of historical "disconnects" and a willingness to probe more deeply than in the past into the apparently unknowable.

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